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## City of Bristol

Office of the Mayor

RESPICE, ADSPICE, PROSPICE

*Look to the Past, Look to the Present, Look to the Future*

### **Testimony on behalf of the City of Bristol in Support of HB 7298 and in Opposition to HB 7295**

Senator Cohen, Representative Demicco, and members of the Environment Committee, I am here today to express support of HB 7298, which includes important provisions to improve efficiencies of state government, eliminate duplicative steps currently practiced by many cities and towns with respect to reporting requirements established by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, and acknowledge that the marketplace has drastically changed for many materials we previously recognized as "curbside residential recyclables."

China's National Sword policy has created a volatile market with limited opportunity for some of the materials routinely collected curbside. It is becoming increasingly challenging to maintain these programs, complicated by recent extended outages at MIRA's Mid-Connecticut waste to energy facility, which resulted in diversion of over 50,000 tons of municipal solid waste to other in-state, as well as out-of-state facilities.

All of this is wreaking havoc on municipal budgets and legislation is needed to ask the Department to revisit state policies and priorities, particularly with respect to how cities and towns provide these services to taxpayers. Initiatives proposed in HB 7298 will take into account a more pragmatic approach to managing solid waste and recyclables in the absence of robust markets for many materials formerly exported to southeast Asia. With no viable markets in the U.S., our taxpayers now bear the brunt of paying for services that we previously received a credit for against our expenses. In Bristol alone, we are anticipating a \$300,000 additional expense to our Solid Waste division on July 1st.

We have already taken steps to revise the recycling mantra that has taken over 25 years to cultivate, and are now advocating for repurposing and diversion out of the waste stream to reduce our costs. Some examples of this include using a grant to purchase household composting containers; seminars and workshops for the public and in the schools as part of our upcoming Earth Day activities; as well as establishing a Trash to Treasure site to set aside items that could be repurposed or used in different settings. Recently our Public Works employees met with a local non-profit that provides furniture and household goods to individuals and families emerging from homelessness and/or domestic violence situations. We have a container that will now hold items that our employees divert there for their use. Other items will be offered to the public for free starting in June as part of our Farmers Market, which incidentally, already offers a weekly electronics recycling option to prevent those items from being added to the waste stream.

An important point in all of this is that if we, the municipalities, are going to these lengths to address this problem, it is vital that the State be our partner in this endeavor. I know that many of my colleagues would join me in support of the 90 day turnaround time for permitting municipal environmental projects. We also appreciate the approach proposed in the bill to facilitate reporting via internet, and to make the process transparent for our public works officials.

In conclusion we note the review of the Department's implementation of the 2016 state solid waste management plan is a welcome opportunity to affirm whether or not the bold initiatives launched with passage of Public Act 14-94 have been fruitful and; even more important, are realistic in today's market.

### **Testimony in Opposition to HB 7295**

On the other end of the policy spectrum, I am concerned by language in HB 7295 which would grant the Commissioner increased authority to penalize cities and towns for a *"making insufficient progress in implementing a recycling and waste reduction program..."* We believe such a determination could rely upon entirely subjective information without clear, measureable parameters. The cities and towns of Connecticut have done well at providing convenient and cost effective waste management services, especially when considering the age of our existing waste facilities. The possibility of enforcement against a municipality for failing to meet ambiguous goals is unlikely to contribute to the desperate need for infrastructure improvement.

HB 7295 proposes a reliance on metrics which involve substantial uncertainty, for example, pounds per capita. We do not have the ability to accurately measure all of the pounds of waste generated by the residents of the City of Bristol. Further, several of our communities in the 14 town regional agency to which we belong experience substantial population fluctuations over time with a transient rental housing stock.

In light of the significant challenges facing municipalities, the choice of the word "enforce" as it relates to the provisions of the state solid waste plan concerns me. I would much prefer to have the DEEP as a partner. To date, I have not read any data that shows that enforcement will solve the state's waste management dilemma. Rather, we need to understand this is a systemic problem deeply rooted in the absence of a quality infrastructure. Therefore, we strongly encourage that the Legislature work with the Executive branch and the Commissioner to emphasize that agency resources focus more attention on issuing permits and promoting a healthy, economically sustainable, practical approach which will not place additional burdens upon already stressed communities.

Municipal officials are ready and interested in being part of the solution and discussing how best to achieve these goals, especially as it relates to the language for designated recyclables, the Comprehensive Materials Management Strategy, and various reporting requirements.